

SITUATION REPORT NO. 1

INCIDENT NO. 2001-101

DATE: September 4, 2001 TIME: 5:00 p.m.

TO: Governor John Hoeven
State Capitol
Bismarck, ND 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Wildfire – Approximately 400 acres of federal, state and private land have burned during a wildfire reported in Billings County on Friday, August 31.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: No deaths or injuries have been reported.
3. DAMAGES: Firefighters expect to achieve containment today of the fire near the Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Elkhorn Ranch site in northern Billings County. Oil well workers reported the fire at approximately 2:30 p.m. Friday, August 31. Wind gusts up to 25 miles per hour (mph) pushed the fire west and north. The fire has burned land owned by local ranchers, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the National Park Service (NPS) and the State Historical Society. One private buffalo corral was destroyed, as well as approximately 500 feet of fence owned by the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Billings County officials reported the ranch site was not damaged; however, brush and trees surrounding the area were burned. Juniper draws and patches sustained heavy damage. No homes are in immediate danger. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Local officials noted the ranch site is fenced and not open to vehicle traffic.

Today's Rangeland Fire Danger Index, issued by the National Weather Service (NWS), indicates that very warm air with moderate humidity levels and winds around 10 mph have pushed the index to the high level for south central and western North Dakota, including Billings County.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: Three Billings County Fire Districts provided pumpers, tankers and grass units. Billings County highway districts provided operators for their blades and loaders. Fire districts in Beach, Sentinel Butte and Golvea provided additional assistance. Billings County law enforcement provided security. The Billings County Emergency Manager provided meals and technical assistance to firefighters. A local fuel supplier provided a tanker for refueling fire units. Three Billings County water trucks supplied water.

STATE: Agencies providing assistance included the N.D. Forest Service, State Historical Society, State Radio Communications and the N.D. Division of Emergency Management.

FEDERAL: The USFS, NPS and the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) Turtle Mountain Agency, Bureau of Forestry/Fire Council, provided firefighters, administrators and

law enforcement.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: Local ranchers plowed firebreaks and supplied all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to reach difficult areas. They also unlocked gated river crossings for firefighters.
6. MAJOR ACTIONS: Officials for the North Dakota Forest Service reported that 103 local, tribal, state and federal firefighting personnel and 23 engines responded to the Elkhorn Ranch fire. Local fire crews that initially responded to the scene cut a fence and stopped the fire before it reached the ranch house. Fire lines were plowed to widen the road to the west and north because of the potential for the fire to reach rough, unbroken lands to the west and an occupied ranch to the north. The Little Missouri River provided a natural barrier on the fire's eastern side. By late August 31, local crews achieved 80 percent containment of the fire. Additional local crews supplemented overnight crews on September 1. USFS personnel arrived the afternoon of September 1 and performed fire mopup work. Agency resources included three-person crews for seven pumpers.

The state's Rural Fire Mitigation Plan triggers restrictions and/or prohibitions when the fire danger, as issued by NWS, reaches the "very high" or "extreme" categories. The Rural Fire Danger Guide can be found at <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Staff from the State Historical Society developed guidelines with USFS personnel for mitigating the impact on cultural areas on state land affected by the fire.

USFS personnel will use global positioning satellite (GPS) equipment later this week to determine the size of the fire.

A cost-share agreement was signed during an officials' meeting Sunday, September 2. Cost shares will be determined once the acreage has been established. Control of the fire was officially released to the USFS. Meeting participants included representatives of the USFS, NPS, North Dakota Forest Service, Billings County Commission, Billings County Fire District, Medora Grazing Association and Billings County Emergency Management.

Billings County law enforcement provided scene control given the fire's proximity to two tourist attractions, the Elkhorn Ranch site and the Maah Daah Hey Trail.

The Billings County Commission passed a resolution on September 4 restricting off-road traffic and open burning and requiring industrial crews to have fire extinguishers on hand and to remain on site one-half hour after work has been completed.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: As indicated.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: As indicated.
9. OTHER INFORMATION: The N.D. Division of Emergency Management's Situation Reports are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director